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SUBJECT: (SBU) BLAIR'S AFRICA PROGRESS PANEL IS TAKING SHAPE

Classified By: PolCouns Richard Mills; reason 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Prime Minister Blair has decided to convene an Africa Progress Panel to ensure that the promises on Africa made at G8 and UN Summits are kept. Kofi Annan has agreed to chair it; Bob Geldof, President Obasanjo, Michel Camdessus, Graca Machel and Peter Eigan (founder of Transparency International) have agreed to join the Panel; Bill Gates has agreed to provide funding and may join the panel, as may Sonia Gandhi. From an unofficial source, we understand the Panel may be announced formally in November. We are seeking additional details and will report them septel. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) During a speech in June, Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that he had "decided to convene a panel of world leaders from all sectors to ensure that our promises to Africa are kept." To be called the Africa Progress Panel (APP), it would "encourage and measure progress against the commitments made to and by Africa at G8 and UN summits, notably Gleneagles, towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals" and would "maintain the international political profile of Africa that was achieved last year." Blair noted that at Gleneagles "the G8 agreed that the existing Africa Partnership Forum (APF) should be strengthened to monitor implementation. The UK and other donors are funding the establishment of a support unit to help the APF carry out its monitoring mandate. The Commission for Africa recommended the establishment of an independent mechanism to monitor and report on progress." Blair said Kofi Annan had agreed to chair the APP and several prominent figures had agreed to be on the Panel: activist/rock star Sir Bob Geldof, President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, Graca Machel (wife of Nelson Mandela), and Peter Eigan (founder of Transparency International). Blair also announced that Bill Gates had "agreed to fund it." He said the APP would "produce an annual report that will be submitted to the G8, the UN and the APF. Blair promised that he himself would "meet the panel regularly to hear reports from them."

¶3. (C) According to Anna Clunes of the Prime Minister's Foreign Policy staff, Michel Camdessus (former executive director of the IMF) has also agreed to join the APP, and

Sonia Gandhi is "95 percent" sure to join. Blair is making a fresh attempt to get Bill Gates to serve on the Panel ("we need an American," as Clunes put it).

14. (C/NF) Retired UK ambassador Myles Wickstead (protect throughout), who ran the secretariat of Blair's Commission for Africa, told Poloff September 20 that he anticipated the Prime Minister would formally announce the APP in November. Wickstead said that he may/may become head of a small APP staff, in which case he would seek to visit G8 capitals shortly thereafter to consult and make clear that the Panel wants to work constructively with G8 governments. A former DFID official, Wickstead said that in addition to Gates, the APP would receive funding from the UK through DFID.

15. (U) We continue to seek additional details and will report them septel.

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